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ABSTRACT

A study investigating the factors most important in creating and maintaining English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs for Hispanic women in prison is reported. The study was undertaken by an ESL teacher who was also an inmate in a maximum security women's correctional institution. Introductory sections describe the prison, inmate population, history of educational programs, and development of the ESL class. The study's methodology is then outlined. The researcher, a Hispanic woman, inmate, and ESL teacher, drew data from her own and assistant tutors' journals concerning ESL instruction, interviews in Spanish with 9 students, and student portfolios. Analysis focused on the roles of self-esteem, motivation, educational history, peer influence, and attitudes toward learning in student success. Two major patterns emerged: (1) Hispanic women with greater motivation, higher self-esteem, longer native-language educational preparation, and more positive attitudes toward learning were attracted to classes that allowed them to further linguistic skills and prepare for more advanced learning, and (2) by participating in humanistically-organized ESL classes where their opinions, values, ideas, and emotions were considered, they were treated with respect and understanding, and they learned from their peers, Hispanic women inmates further improved their motivation, self-esteem, and attitudes toward learning. Implications are discussed and recommendations made for prison teachers and administrators. Contains 26 references. (MSE) (Adjunct Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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ED 382 056

"UNTIL I LEARN ENGLISH, I WILL ALWAYS LIVE IN A PRISON": TEACHING E.S.L. TO HISPANIC WOMEN INMATES*

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Dr. Alicia Pousada, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras

0.0 Preface

The paper you are about to hear was prepared primarily by Iris Cordero who is unfortunately unable to be with us today due to the limitations of her incarceration. I will serve as her spokesperson, but I would like you to know that you are all much the poorer for not hearing Iris in person. She is a remarkably articulate, attractive, dignified, focused, and self-disciplined young Dominican woman who has managed, through her own initiative and perseverance, to launch and sustain a humanistic and communicatively-oriented E.S.L. program in a very inauspicious setting. While relatively new to the world of E.S.L. and for the most part self-taught as a teacher, she is destined to make a real contribution to the field upon her release this summer. Her inmate students can already vouch for this, as they have benefited repeatedly from her sensitivity and caring and her attempts to empower them in the spirit of true rehabilitation.

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*Paper presented at CUNY ESL Council conference, Hostos Community College, New York City, March 4, 1995.

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I present to you therefore the fruits of her labor--a distillation of her nearly completed Master's thesis in Education. Please consider this paper as her academic debut in absentia.

1.0 Introduction

There are many dynamics involved in learning and teaching a second language. For any language learner, it means understanding the complex structure and mechanics of a new language and integrating them into daily life. For the imprisoned student, it also means confronting many negative forces that may impede successful acquisition. For the prison teacher, it means exploring those variables that play a role in language development and developing strategies which will help inmate students feel comfortable and confident during the language learning experience.

The present study examines the factors which positively or negatively influence the success of female Hispanic E.S.L. learners in a maximum security correctional facility. In particular, what cultural and personal traits do the inmates bring to the learning process as part of their identities as Hispanic women? How do these work for and against their progress in English? What impels some individuals to succeed and learn even under the most adverse conditions?

Among the critical characteristics of any E.S.L. students which may contribute to or detract from their English learning are their sense of self-esteem, personal motivation, educational history, peer influence, and attitudes toward learning. These are especially salient when dealing with an inmate population whose self-worth is negated on a daily basis, whose motivation to learn may be tainted by the desire to impress the parole board, and whose educational history is spotty at best. In addition, prisoners (before and during their enounter with the correctional system) experience peer influence of both a positive and negative kind. Furthermore, as Hispanic women dominated to a great extent by males in their families, they bring with them certain attitudes regarding their own intellectual capacities and the utility of learning in their daily lives which may hinder performance.

The research described here is based upon participant observation by Iris Cordero, the E.S.L. teacher (also a female Hispanic inmate). It utilizes qualitative analysis of daily journal entries made by Iris and her assistant tutors, interviews carried out with the students, and portfolios of student work. The overall goal is to demonstrate from the emic perspective of an insider which factors are most important in creating and maintaining E.S.L. programs for Hispanic women in prison. It is hoped that such information will be useful to E.S.L. teachers on the outside who receive assignments in

correctional facilities. It is also hoped that examination of a captive student population may shed light on the larger questions of overcoming the affective filter and providing meaningful input to language learners (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982).

2.0 Background

2.1 The facility

There are seven prisons for women in New York State; however, Bedford Hills Correctional Facility is the only female maximum security prison. Located in northeastern Westchester County, it presently houses 735 women, 51% of whom are Black and 27%, Hispanic (N. Y. S. Department of Correctional Services 1995 statistics). Forty-four percent of the women in Bedford Hills were convicted of a drug offense (Boudin 1993:208); however, it is estimated that drugs are responsible for the incarceration of 95% of the inmates (Church 1990). Sixty-three percent of the women do not have a high school diploma, and almost 20% read at less than a fifth grade level (Nuttall 1988). In addition, 73% are mothers, with most functioning as single heads of households. Since Bedford is a reception prison, prisoners with sentences of less than five years are transferred out, so those who stay, tend to stay for a long time.

On the outside, these women confronted numerous socioeconomic problems, including poverty, domestic and community violence, substance abuse and its resultant criminality, single parenting dilemmas, and in many cases, immigration hassles. The Hispanic women, in particular, were economically and socially constrained due to their limited English proficiency, persistent racist attitudes toward speakers of Spanish in U.S. society, and the pervasive sexism which is part and parcel of traditional Hispanic community life.

Bedford Hills was first established in 1901 as Westfield Farm, and it still retains a rural look, if one ignores the watch tower and razor wire. In comparison with other facilities, Bedford Hills offers advantages in the way of special programs; however, it is by no means the "resort" critics would have us believe. It has had its share of "celebrities" who have contributed to its more humane operation (e.g. Jean Harris, Kathy Boudin, Judy Clark). Nevertheless, their struggles were arduous, and the programs have never been safe from excision.

2.2 Educational programs

Sections 136 and 137 of the Corrections Law in the State of New York require the Department of Corrections to assess a prisoner's educational and vocational needs and:

> provide each inmate with a program of education which seems most likely to further the process of socialization and rehabilitation, the objective being to return these inmates to society with a more wholesome attitude toward living, with a desire to conduct themselves as good citizens, and with the skill and knowledge which will give them a reasonable chance to maintain themselves and their dependents through honest labor (Harris 1988:185).

The issue of rehabilitation is a sore point among inmates (Berry 1972). For most, prison time does not rehabilitate but rather corrodes creative individuality and operates against realistic readjustment (Minton 1971: 210). Iris can certainly corroborate the truth of this statement for many of her sisters in prison. However, she and her E.S.L. students operate on the premise that learning English is a key to liberation and empowerment. As the title of this presentation indicates, until the women enjoy full proficiency in English, they feel they cannot be truly free, in or out of prison. For those who have lengthy sentences, the E.S.L. class and other educational programs are a deterrent to becoming empty vessels in a human warehouse.

In order to comprehend the role of educational programs at Bedford Hills, it is necessary to examine the history of prison education. In the early part of this century, education programs in prisons were practically unknown and viewed as a form of coddling. Later, literacy programs were

initiated by missionaries in order to teach the Bible. It is only during the last 40 years or so that education has been seen as an integral part of rehabilitation (Silva 1994). In 1964, it was found that 33% of New York State inmates were functionally illiterate and 96% were dropouts (Eyman 1971). General Educational Development (G.E.D.) programs were instituted to help inmates complete secondary studies and prepare for eventual employment on the outside. These programs were found to boost morale, improve self-image, and increase self-confidence. College programs were also established to assist prisoners in developing problem-solving strategies, interpersonal and social skills, and ethical/moral standards that would guide offenders in their new lives once released, as well as prepare them for more specialized employment (Jones and d'Errico 1994). Colleges nation-wide have collaborated with prisons to provide degree programs to assist prisoners in breaking the cycle of failure in which they find themselves (cf. Mason's 1994 report on her own personal experience).

There are a number of educational and vocational programs at Bedford Hills. The vocational programs include hands-on experience in General Business, building maintenance, cosmetology, horticulture, and printing. The educational programs consist of Adult Basic Education, pre-G.E.D., G.E.D., English as a Second Language, and Associate and Bachelor's degree programs

through Mercy College. In addition, there are special programs like the Outreach program, the Parenting and Foster Care Program of the Children's Center, the Family Violence program, and the AIDS Counseling and Education program.

The college program has a Learning Center which offers individual tutoring, study groups, a professional counselor, a writing specialist, outside library services, and 15 computers, all funded by H.E.O.P. (Higher Educational Opportunity Program). The Center is one of the most elite and positive places within the prison. There are 20 tutors on staff, both paid and unpaid. The E.S.L. program described in this paper was created to extend the services of the Learning Center to Hispanic women who had achieved a certain degree of formal education in their own countries but were impeded from participating in college classes in the U.S. by their lack of English proficiency.

2.3 Development of the ESL class

Until 1978, it was against prison rules to speak Spanish at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. As Jean Harris explained: "If you were heard, you got a charge sheet. Then a busload of Hispanics and activists picketed the facility and the rule changed" (1988:233). Today speaking Spanish is normal behavior among the Hispanic women; in fact, some successfully avoid

interaction in English altogether. Monolingual correction officers often hold this against the women and mock them for speaking "broken English." But then ironically, they also often resent the women for benefiting from educational programs paid for by "their" taxes. (C.O.'s are merely required to possess a G.E.D., so there are significant numbers of prisoners who by taking advantage of high school equivalency and college programs are far more educated than their captors.)

In 1993, after state budget cutbacks eliminated many academic programs within the correctional facility, among them an existing E.S.L. program taught by a civilian, Iris Cordero (Head Tutor of the Learning Center) decided to start a voluntary, bi-weekly evening E.S.L. class to bring Hispanic women into the Center where they had never felt particularly welcome. The criteria for participation were that the students have a G.E.D. or high school diploma and a desire to learn. The goal of the class was to develop English fluency so that the women could extend their academic horizons and/or compete more favorably for jobs once released. No funding was ever provided for the class, nor were credits awarded to students, which makes its success all the more remarkable.

The original group of eleven consisted of a mix of South Americans, Central Americans, and Caribbeans. All were literate in their native

language, and all (except one) had lived in the U.S. for only a short time prior to coming to prison and therefore did not know English well. Most had come to the U.S. with the expectation of achieving the "American Dream." The majority settled into communities where the primary language spoken was Spanish, and there was thus little opportunity or encouragement to get jobs where English was required.

The women felt comfortable in these communities and thought that they could attain their goals via their native language. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. Lacking the skills and preparation for the work force, they became involved in illegal conduct and ended up in prison.

Because prisoners are constantly being reassigned within the system, the E.S.L. class has suffered changes over the past year. What will be presented here is the group of nine women who are currently in the class. These women range in age from 24 to 55. Five are from Columbia, two are from Puerto Rico, one is from Peru, and one is from Ecuador. Eight of the nine regard Spanish as the primary language of their home; however, all nine have family members who speak English.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participant observation

In order to document the growth of the E.S.L. class and assess the effectiveness of the methods she was using, from the start Iris recorded her daily activities and impressions in a journal. Later when she began her thesis work and wished to examine student personality traits, she refined this practice into a conscious policy of participant observation.

Participant observation is a qualitative technique in which the researcher simultaneously occupies the roles of observer and in-group member. The researcher is able to understand social behavior by uncovering the way group members define a situation, that is, their perception and interpretation of reality and how these relate to their conduct (Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht, 1984: 207).

As an inmate teacher, Iris is in a perfect position to scrutinize and analyse the second language learning experience of her students. Since she too lives their day-to-day reality and has to adhere to the same rules, she is particularly sensitive to their concerns. Like them, she endures the pain of separation from loved ones and the years of solitude. As a Hispanic woman, she shares a common language and many beliefs with her students. As a former E.S.L. learner, she knows what it is to struggle with the English

language. All of this has permitted her to identify with her students and seek ways to build their self-confidence, motivation, and attitudes toward learning.

On the other hand, her more advanced level of formal education, sophisticated linguistic preparation, and habits of critical thinking allow her to step back from the details of her daily existence and perceive larger patterns in the behavior of her students. The self-discipline acquired through long hours of individual scholarship make it possible for her to be dispassionate in her analysis of the barriers which impede the learning process for her students.

3.2 Journals

The primary resource that facilitated Iris' duality as participant observer was her journal and those of the inmate tutors who assisted her. Keeping the journals was a way of noting important details which were significant in the E.S.L. class. The journals allowed her to evaluate student progress, assess teaching methods and materials, document problems, probe her own difficulties and disappointments, and step back and get the big picture on a regular basis. As Iris puts it: "My journal is a place where I can discover what I really think about by writing it down."

Journal entries were written on the computer immediately after each class, so they are exceedingly detailed and accurate. Tutors were trained to write similarly detailed accounts of each tutoring or whole group session they were involved in. This allowed Iris to "witness" events that she was not present for and enhanced the reliability of the data.

3.3 Interviews

As a means of corroborating the observational data noted in the journals, Iris carried out hour long interviews in Spanish with each of the nine students. She utilized a questionnaire of 29 items to obtain information about the students' personal and educational backgrounds, learning experiences, language attitudes, and opinions regarding the role of self-esteem and motivation in second language acquisition.

Since prison officials would not allow her (for security reasons) to utilize a tape recorder for her interviews, Iris conducted them at the computer and typed in responses to questions as they were uttered. While cumbersome and unnatural, this eliminated the tedious task of transcription and permitted each student to read her response and elaborate upon it if needed.

The data from the interviews helped to put the classroom observations into perspective and supplied the necessary consistency needed to compare the women across the same parameters.

3.4 Student portfolios

Iris also kept portfolios of student work in order to maintain records where students could see their academic achievements periodically during the year. Since most tended to underestimate their academic and linguistic abilities, it was very instructive for them to view the growing collection of essays, role plays, reactions to guest lectures, reactions to movies, tests, spelling quizzes, and collages, all products of their own hands and minds and all in English, the presumably unlearnable language. (This same technique was used successfully by Campbell (1978) in teaching English literature to male prisoners in a maximum security facility in California.)

Now let us turn to the findings of Iris' two year examination of the E.S.L. class. Time does not permit a lengthy exploration, but here are some highlights of her observations of the role of self-esteem, motivation, educational history, peer influence, and attitudes toward learning.

4.0 Factors involved in second language learning

4.1 Self-esteem

Many Hispanic women inmates tend to suffer from low self-esteem, which can be attributed to their traditional rearing as little girls. Hispanic women are expected to obey and please their husbands, stay at home and raise their children, and afterwards help rear grandchildren or great-grandchildren. They are not usually encouraged, helped, or allowed to develop themselves or to recognize that they can contribute to society through their ideas and intelligence. Because of this, learning to love themselves is difficult, and blindly following the lead of men who profess love for them is a major contributing factor in their imprisonment.

Many have no sense of direction, do not want to take responsibility for their confinement, and use their limited English as an excuse to continue failing. They often seek out other Hispanic women and establish pseudo-families in which Spanish is the language spoken. The idea is to preserve their lives much as they were on the outside. They pass the time reading Spanish romance novels, cooking, gossiping, knitting, and keeping outsiders from invading the "family" group. Education is not a priority, and the only reason they attend classes is because the facility mandates participation in at least one program.

Tellingly, the students in Iris' E.S.L. class do not fit this pattern. Their self-esteem is evident in their advanced mastery of their native language, their physical carriage, the way they interact with other individuals in the facility, and their readiness to seek out programs that can benefit their personal growth.

When asked to define self-esteem, they all agree that it refers to taking care of one's health and mind, feeling complete, and valuing oneself. All believe that self-esteem is important when learning a second language because it allows one to feel confident and care about learning. Self-esteem motivates goal completion. Knowing more than one language makes them feel proud and serves as a mark of growth in an environment where stagnation is common.

Five of the nine rate their self-esteem as "excellent," and the other four say it is "good." One of the students explains that her self-esteem was only "fair" before becoming involved in the E.S.L. class but now it is "excellent" because she has disciplined her mind. All the students agree that the English class has helped them to feel good about themselves, complete goals, have their ideas under control, and make better decisions.

4.2 Motivation

In the prison, many Hispanic women congregate and constantly speak their native language, a practice which deters them from gaining fluency in English. Some desire to learn and broaden their horizons; however, many believe that learning the English language or getting an education is useless because they are facing deportation. They do not recognize the value of an education and see no future ahead of them except as housewives or mothers. Thus they take on menial tasks within the prison and complete their sentenced period without learning anything which will be of use to them once released.

Such individuals do not appear among the ranks of Iris' E.S.L. class. The E.S.L. students want to learn, despite lengthy sentences or deportation, and have realized that life is only as meaningful as one makes it (cf. Mangan 1987). One woman claims that when she arrived at Bedford, she was unable to speak any English at all and had to depend on bilingual women to translate for her. Because of the E.S.L. class, she can now express her thoughts and communicate with other individuals. Other students feel that learning English will help them get better jobs or enter a career after their release, a critical factor in preventing recidivism, which is now about 52%, according to the Bureau of Higher Education Opportunity Programs (1994).

All nine of the students consider themselves to be motivated. Five remember a time when learning English was not important to them, but now they are strongly motivated to learn. Eight attribute their motivation to the encouragement of family members, prison tutors, and other teachers.

The strongest indication of the level of motivation of the E.S.L. students is the fact that they have participated continuously on a voluntary basis without payment or degree credits. Moreover, the class is taught during the evening which is to many inmates the most valuable part of their day since they are not programmed and can stay on the unit writing letters, relaxing, watching television, talking on the telephone, etc. Nevertheless, the E.S.L. students' interest and desire to learn makes it worth their while to forfeit their leisure time. Instead of becoming engulfed and lost in a system where most get easily discouraged, the E.S.L. students have opted to find significance and maintain their sanity through education.

Among the reasons given for attending the E.S.L. class are: a desire to learn, the special relationships established with fellow classmates, the teacher and the different methods she employs, and the chance to be involved in peer instruction. Iris is very aware of the problem of motivation and utilizes various techniques to stimulate the students. Among these are: teaching through real communication, caring and providing support,

organizing peer teaching, presenting meaningful activities, soliciting spontaneous expression, and validating student opinions and beliefs. All indications are that these have been effective.

Of course, it is not enough simply to be motivated. There are many obstacles to learning in a prison setting. Personal problems at home, legal complications, and hassles in the prison are barriers that may impede inmate students. Frequently when a student has domestic problems, she experiences a sense of helplessness and loss of control which usually carries over into class and disrupts the learning process. Sometimes a student may find herself in a state of depression or anguish because of her sentence or legal matters. This can transform her into a non-productive individual whose only desire is to live in self-pity.

Iris' approach to such problems has been to help students avoid the "pity trip" and seek solutions rather than wallow in misery. She permits students to leave class when necessary, but she does not let them use their problems as an excuse for failure. Her attitude is that, as the teacher, it is up to her to help students empower themselves and seek alternative ways to deal with painful situations. She encourages students to use their writing skills as a tool to relate their concerns to the administration instead of sitting back and waiting for things to happen.

Another deterrent to learning lies in the inconsistency and arbitrariness of rules in the facility (cf. Berry 1972). The E.S.L. class has suffered numerous times from cancellations due to the incompetence or uncooperativeness of correctional officers who seem dedicated to sabotaging every effort the inmates make to better their situation. Iris has repeatedly had to confront the prison administration to defend her students' rights.

4.3 Educational history

In teaching E.S.L. students, it is imperative to trace their educational history since every student is an individual and brings to the class different preferences, learning strategies, and educational levels. The E.S.L. teacher must explore and examine the educational history of those she has pledged to teach so she can assess where each has been and what they can reasonably achieve.

Because of the selection criteria for the class, the E.S.L. students are overall more educated than the average inmate at Bedford. Six of the nine students completed high school in their native countries, and three of these also took college classes. Of the women who attended college, one obtained a degree in Business Administration and the other two attended school in the U.S. Six have additionally obtained G.E.D.'s while incarcerated, and two

others are planning to take the G.E.D. exam in March. One has a high school diploma from the U.S. and for this reason is not pursuing a G.E.D.

Six of the nine studied basic English in their native countries, but their real English acquisition has taken place in the U.S. Two claim to have learned it in prison. All of them have experienced formal education in English, but also learned a lot from television, music, and individual tutoring.

Seven consider English to be difficult, particularly pronunciation and writing. The other two feel that English is learnable provided one makes the necessary effort. The reasons given for learning English are mostly instrumental--for better communication, for better jobs, to enhance knowledge, to read better books, to avoid reliance on interpreters, to defend oneself from discrimination and emotional abuse in the prison, and for personal growth. All of the students see English as playing a major role in their lives after release, in particular for jobs, going to college, and communicating with their children.

4.4 Peer influence

Among the greatest influences and sources of guidance from which the E.S.L. students derive knowledge and inspiration are the relationships formed with their peers. Those students who are more fluent in English

encourage those that are not as advanced and provide a model of what can be accomplished.

One of the things pointed to with enthusiasm about the E.S.L. class is the technique of peer teaching. Iris often pairs off students to work together and pool their knowledge on specific tasks. Students who never before felt important or valued have come to feel so because of this opportunity to "teach" a fellow classmate. They also relate very positively to Iris as teacher since she is also an inmate and has gone through many of the same problems, both in and out of prison, as they have. She often shares her experiences with them to further this identification. In addition, Iris utilizes inmate tutors as assistants to help with the teaching of the E.S.L. class. This enhances the communication with the students even more.

45 Attitudes toward learning

Recent research suggests that an affirmative attitude toward learning has a tremendous positive impact on the successful attainment of communicative skills in a second language (see Gardner, et. al., 1976; Hatch, 1976; Oller, Hudson, and Liu, 1977; Harmer, 1991). Unfortunately, many Hispanic women have been raised to believe that education is unnecessary and of no value to their personal growth. These attitudes create barriers which limit their ability to progress academically and linguistically. Others,

because of age, believe that learning a second language is difficult and tedious. When they go into the learning process with this attitude, they become easily frustrated and subsequently fail.

In contrast, all of the nine E.S.L. students feel confident about learning new things. This, they state, is possible because they consider themselves intelligent and able to acquire new skills and because they are open-minded and interested in learning. Six of the nine indicate that no one has ever told them that they could not learn something. One asserts that if anyone does, she will insult them because she knows she can learn. Another boasts that most people consider her to be intelligent. A third reports that a friend who originally laughed at her for studying English at her advanced age has now become inspired to study also. The other three students in the class claim that they <u>have</u> been told that they were incapable of learning by friends and teachers. However, they assert that such criticism has never dissuaded them from trying.

All nine students consider that they are learning English in the class. As evidence they offer their portfolios full of work in writing, oral communication, grammar, pronunciation, and reading. As pleased as they are with their personal progress in English, they have further goals. Among

these are developing greater skills in writing, computers, math, singing, poetry, pronunciation, and speaking.

5.0 Conclusions

For the women at Bedford Hills, learning English has meant coming to terms with issues which they never considered as "free" women. It has meant learning about the importance of education to women and making the decision to learn English so they could carve out purposeful careers and roles in society after release. It has also meant discovering that they had academic potential which was never acknowledged or utilized until they came to prison.

Today after many months of participating in the E.S.L. class, they are on their way to gaining fluency in English. They no longer need interpreters to speak for them. They hold better working positions in the prison and contribute their time and effort in different areas of the prison community to educate those Hispanic women who have not yet reached a stage of personal academic empowerment. Most importantly, they have proven to other Hispanic women that with determination, discipline, and hard work, their lives can be changed for the better.

5.1 Summary of findings

The study of the E.S.L. class reveals two noteworthy patterns:

I. Hispanic women inmates with greater motivation, higher self-esteem, longer educational preparation in their native language, and more positive attitudes toward learning are attracted to classes which allow them to further their linguistic skills and prepare for more advanced learning; and

II. By participating in a humanistically-organized E.S.L. class where: (1) their opinions, values, ideas, and emotions are considered, (2) they are treated with respect and understanding, and (3) they learn from their peers, Hispanic women inmates further improve their motivation, self-esteem, and attitudes toward learning.

In other words, while the E.S.L. students were self-selected and already equipped in terms of personal traits to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the E.S.L. class, the class itself furthered the development of those very traits.

5.2 Implications

The work carried out by Iris Cordero with her inmate students provides independent confirmation of the utility of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's directive that E.S.L. teachers should lower the affective filter and present students with meaningful input. Nowhere are there students whose

affective filter is higher than those incarcerated for long and often indeterminate stretches in prisons where the language of control is foreign to them. Nowhere is the need to provide meaningful and genuine language input more pressing than among students behind bars who are desperately seeking a way to connect what they are learning to the building of a productive future on the outside. The fact that Iris Cordero has been able to assist her students in achieving success in English by lowering their affective filter and providing meaningful input makes these techniques all the more salient for the rest of us teaching under less trying circumstances.

5.3 Recommendations

Although this study took place in a correctional facility, the students' problems are similar in kind (if not in intensity) to those experienced by students in the "free" world. Iris and her students have discussed certain recommendations which they would like to share with all E.S.L. teachers, in particular those considering teaching in a prison.

In their opinions, an E.S.L. instructor should:

a. Teach language creatively using discussions about the students' cultures and life experiences, games, problem-solving exercises, etc.;

b. Maintain high expectations of the students and show them that they are capable of completing any task regardless of educational level or the barriers to learning which may be present;

c. Become part of the group rather than a stranger in the classroom by sharing life experiences and learning as much as possible about the students' backgrounds and needs;

d. Be flexible and sensitive to student problems and stresses;

e. Use cultural workshops and presentations by outside guests to expose students to more genuine forms of English and to new ideas;

f. Practice patience and tolerance toward students who may harbor resentment toward authority figures;

g. Help students apply their new skills in areas where English is required (in prisons, this would include the business office, law library, facility library, etc.);

h. Assist students in identifying a purpose for learning and devising a realistic plan of action for their future;

i. Utilize communicative and humanistic methods to capture student interest and develop communicative competence; and

j. Implement meaningful curricula to teach students to do things through language while at the same time enabling them to master the structural features necessary to achieve this goal.

In addition to these recommendations for teachers, Iris and her students urge prison administrators to consider more seriously the paid employment of inmate teachers. At Bedford Hills, all the educational programs have inmate teacher's aides or inmate instructors. Such individuals must possess either a G.E.D. or college degree and expertise in the area being taught.

Inmate educators have prison life experience and can address issues not understood by civilian teachers. They help students adjust to the prison community and make sense of their new environment. While they sometimes confront feelings of hostility from fellow prisoners who envy their status, resent their authority, or even question their teaching capacity, compassionate and supportive inmate teachers can overcome such negativity and win students' respect. Furthermore, inmate teachers make prison education feasible in the face of budget cuts and civilian teacher lay-offs.

Kenneth Dimick wrote in 1979 that:

> Teaching, no matter what the subject, isn't easy in the prison.....Most of the teachers, working for nothing, rapidly come to the conclusion that for no pay they deserve something better and go on their way. Neither surprising or disappointing is the fact because no one expected them to last (113).

In contrast, for better or for worse, inmate teachers are generally there for the duration and can see the long-term effects of their labors.

5.4 The future

Department of Corrections officials assert that the purpose of correctional institutions is to correct deviant behavior so that prisoners can live in society as law-abiding citizens. This is attempted through educational, vocational, and therapeutic programs. However, in actuality,

the day-to-day operation of prisons is based upon security rules whose main goal is to maintain order. Within this perspective, there is little approval or encouragement given to inmates who attempt to improve themselves because empowerment is seen as a threat to the established order.

On the outside, similarly negative views of prison education are prevalent. As each year passes, society's attitude towards inmates receiving instruction worsens. Citizens resent the fact that prisoners who have victimized other individuals are receiving a free education. The belief of some Americans is that prisons should return to what they once represented--hard labor, punishment, and no education.

In 1991, a study done by the New York State Department of Correctional Services indicated that inmates who earned a college degree returned to prison at a significantly lower rate than those who did not receive an education (only 26% vs. 47%). These figures demonstrate that education is a catalyst for the reduction of crime in society.

Nevertheless, since 1987, at least ten programs have been terminated at Bedford Hills due to budget cutbacks. In 1994, the Pell grants to imprisoned college students which had been in operation since 1972 were eliminated. Now, as part of his new budget, Governor Pataki has declared that funds from the TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) will no longer be

allocated to prisoners, in effect sounding the death knell for prison college programs in 1995.

With the rise of crime in our communities, the number of women sent to correctional institutions has also increased. Domestic violence crimes and the drug epidemic have taken a toll, and the small percentage of female prisoners is now significantly higher (up to about 15% of the total penal population, according to Pollack, 1990). Without educational programs to provide positive outlets and hope for these women, we can expect an increase in prison violence and recidivism.

Iris Cordero has been able to help a group of women liberate themselves by learning English and preparing for a productive life. However, the Learning Center where they meet, the computers they write on, and the tutors they use outside of class are all H.E.O.P. funded and will be lost after this summer. Iris herself will be leaving the facility in July. All of this would seem to spell the end of the E.S.L. class, but Iris has done her job well, and others are ready to carry on no matter how tough the circumstances.

We hope that this paper has given you a small glimpse into the frustrations and challenges of prison E.S.L. instruction. Thank you for the opportunity to share it with you.

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